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## The JFK Assassination: Defending the Gangster State

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**M**uch of history is a chronicle of immense atrocities. Whenever surplus wealth accumulates in any society, whenever people emerge from a cooperative subsistence economy, some portion of the population will do everything it can to exploit the labor of the rest of the people in as pitiless a manner as possible. This is true whether it be the slaveholders of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, and the antebellum American South; or the feudal aristocracy of medieval Europe; or the financial moguls of modern capitalist society. Today, throughout much of the capitalist Third World and increasingly in the United States and other industrialized nations, people are being driven into desperation and want, made to work harder for less, when able to find work.

### The Gangster State

The state is the instrument used in all these societies by the wealthy few to impoverish and maintain control over the many. Aside from performing collective functions necessary for all societies, the state has the particular task of protecting the process of accumulating wealth for the few. Throughout our country's history, people have fought back and sometimes gained a limited degree of self-protective rights: universal suffrage, civil liberties, the right to collective bargaining, the eight-hour day, public education, social security, and some human services. While these democratic gains are frequently violated and prove insufficient as a restraint against state power, their importance should not be denied.

Today in the much vaunted western democracies there exists a great deal of unaccountable state power whose primary function is to maintain the existing politico-economic structure, using surveillance, infiltration, sabotage, judicial harassment, disinformation, trumped-up charges and false arrests, tax harassment, blackmail, and even violence and assassination to make the world safe for those who own it.

There exists a state within the state, known as the national security state, a component of misgovernment centering around top officers in the CIA, DIA, FBI, the Pentagon, and policymakers in the Executive Office of the White House. These elements have proven themselves capable of perpetrating terrible crimes against dissidents at home and abroad.

National security state agencies like the CIA, in the service of dominant economic interests, have enlisted the efforts of mobsters, drug traffickers, assassins, and torturers, systematically targeting peasant leaders, intellectuals, journalists, student leaders, clergy, labor union leaders, workers, and community activists in numerous countries. Hundreds of thousands of people have been murdered to prevent social change, to destroy any government or social movement that manifests an unwillingness to reduce its people to economic fodder for the giant corporations that rule the world's economy.

## ***JFK*, the Media Mugging**

Occasionally an incident occurs that reveals in an unusually vivid manner the gangster nature of the state. The assassination of President John Kennedy in November 1963 is such an occasion. The dirty truth is that Kennedy was heartily hated by right-wing forces in this country, including many powerful people in the intelligence organizations. He had betrayed the national interest as they defined it, by refusing to go all out against Cuba, making overtures of rapprochement with Castro, and refusing to escalate the ground war in Vietnam. They also saw him as an anti-business liberal who was taking the country down the wrong path. Whether Kennedy really was all that liberal is another matter. What the national security rightists saw him to be was what counted.

To know the truth about the assassination of John Kennedy is to call into question the state security system and the entire politico-economic order it protects. This is why for over thirty years the corporate-owned press and numerous political leaders have suppressed or attacked the many revelations about the murder unearthed by independent investigators like Mark Lane, Peter Dale Scott, Carl Oglesby, Harold Weisberg, Anthony Summers, Philip Melanson, Jim Garrison, Cyril Wecht, Jim Marrs, Gaeton Fonzi, Sylvia Meagher, Michael Canfield, James DiEugenio, and many others. These investigators have been described as "assassination buffs." The term "buff" is a diminishing characterization, describing someone who pursues odd hobbies. For the same reason that we would not refer to "Holocaust buffs," so should we not refer to these serious investigators as "assassination buffs." Their efforts reveal a conspiracy to assassinate the president and an even more extensive conspiracy to hide the crime.

While ignoring their revelations, the media have given fulsome publicity to the likes of Gerald Posner, author of *Case Closed*, a grotesque whitewash of the assassination. Posner's book was not a sloppy, confused work but a deliberate contrivance that used outright untruths to conclude that Lee Harvey Oswald was a disgruntled lone leftist who killed Kennedy. Posner could get away with his misrepresentations because those who have written systematic exposures of his book were either ignored by the corporate owned media or roughed up by unsympathetic reviewers and editors.

An end run around the media blackout was achieved by Oliver Stone's movie *JFK*, a film that directly reached millions of viewers with an accurate account of the specifics of the assassination. The movie could not simply be ignored because it was reaching a mass audience. So the press savaged it. As far as I know, *JFK* is the only movie in film history that was attacked, six months *before* it was released, in just about every major broadcast and print outlet. The *Washington Post*, for instance, gave George Lardner Jr. the whole front page of its Sunday "Outlook" section (5/19/91) to slam Stone for "chasing fiction." Lardner was an

interesting choice to review this particular movie, being the *Post* reporter who covered the CIA and who never wrote a critical word about that agency.

The media's ideological gatekeepers threw restraint to the wind when dealing with Stone's film. Conservative news columnist George Will, not known for writing movie reviews, penned a rant against *JFK*, calling it "a cartoon history" and "a three hour lie." Will describes Stone as "an intellectual sociopath, combining moral arrogance with historical ignorance . . . a specimen of the sixties' arrested development. . . . Intellectually, Stone is on all fours . . . part of a long fringe tradition . . . banally venal, reckless, cruel" (*Washington Post*, 12/27/91). By relying on invective, Will avoided the more difficult task of rebutting the points made in Stone's film.

Shoulder to shoulder with conservatives like Will stood liberal centrists like Daniel Schorr, the NPR radio commentator who attacked Stone three times on the air, always in sarcastic and general terms, without ever coming to grips with the information proffered by the movie.

Then there was Tom Wicker, a syndicated columnist who also had never done a movie review, but when *JFK* came out, he wrote one that covered a whole page, complete with photos (*New York Times*, 12/15/91). In it, Wicker said something revealing:

If the wild assertions in Oliver Stone's movie are taken at face value, Americans will have to accept the idea that most of the nation's major institutions conspired together and carried out Kennedy's murder. In an era when mistrust of government and loss of confidence in institutions--the press not the least--are widespread and virulent, such a suggestion seems a dubious public service.

In so many words Wicker was disclosing the basic reason why such a merciless attack had been launched against Stone's movie. A full exposure of the assassination conspiracy would invite serious discredit upon the legitimacy of the dominant institutions of state and class. Playing before mass audiences, *JFK* did not accuse a cabal of malevolent perpetrators, but pointed to the national security state itself, inviting millions of viewers to question the kind of state system under which they lived.

*JFK* is the only movie I know that continues to be attacked years after its run. Reviewers and commentators persist in making gratuitous references, describing Oliver Stone as "the man who reinvented history with movies such as *JFK*" (*Oakland Tribune*, 10/13/95), referring to "Oliver Stone's near-pathological monkeying with history" (*East Bay Express*, 12/14/95), and describing him as "a man who makes his living being a ranting maniac" and a "dangerous fellow" (*San Francisco Examiner*, 1/9/96). If anyone is ranting, it's the press.

Sociologist David Simone compiled a study of the books published on the Kennedy assassination, some 600 titles, and found that 20 percent of them blamed either a lone assassin or the mafia or the Cubans or Russians. The other 80 percent ascribed the assassination to a conspiracy linked to U.S. intelligence agencies, some of these also saying that mobsters were involved at the operational level. Ignoring this 80 percent of the literature, publications like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have listed the various theories about the JFK assassination as follows: (a) lone assassin, (b) mafia, (c) Cubans/Soviets, and (d) the "Oliver Stone movie theory." In other words, they ignore the existence of a vast literature from which the movie is derived and ascribe the critical theme presented within the

film solely to the imagination of a film maker. The press would have us believe that the notion of a state-sponsored assassination conspiracy and coverup came out of a movie--when actually the movie was based on a rich and revealing investigative literature.

Like the Warren Commission, the press assumed a priori that Oswald was the killer. The only question it asked was: Did Oswald act alone? The answer was a loudly orchestrated YES. Meanwhile, almost every in-depth investigator had a different conclusion: Oswald did not act at all. He was not one of the people who shot Kennedy, although he was involved in another way, as a fall guy, in his own words "just a patsy."

The media have been tireless in their efforts to suppress the truth about the gangster state. In 1978, when a House Select Committee concluded that there was more than one assassin involved in the Kennedy shooting, the *Washington Post* (1/6/79) editorialized:

Could it have been some other malcontent who Mr. Oswald met casually? Could not as much as three or four societal outcasts with no ties to any one organization have developed in some spontaneous way a common determination to express their alienation in the killing of President Kennedy? It is possible that two persons acting independently attempted to shoot the President at the very same time.

It is "possible," but also most unlikely and barely imaginable. Instead of a conspiracy theory the *Post* creates a one-in-a-billion "coincidence theory" that is the most fanciful of all explanations.

## **Ignored Evidence, Unanswered Questions**

David Garrow, author of a biography of Martin Luther King, condescendingly says: "A large majority of the American people do believe in assassination conspiracies. That allows events to have large mysterious causes instead of small idiosyncratic ones." Contrary to Garrow, the question of whether a conspiracy exists in any particular situation has to be decided by an investigation of evidence, not by patronizing presumptions about the public mind. Investigators who concluded there were conspiracies in the Kennedy and King murders did not fashion "large mysterious causes" but came to their conclusions through painstaking probes of troubling discrepancies, obvious lies, and blatant coverups. They have been impelled not by the need to fashion elaborate theories but by the search for particular explanations about some simple and compelling truths.

Many people talk about finding the "smoking gun" behind this or that mystery, the one evidentiary item that dramatically resolves the case and puts to rest all further questions. Unlike fictional mysteries, in real life there usually is no smoking gun. Historians work by a process of accretion, putting piece by piece together until a picture emerges. In the Kennedy murder the pieces make an imposing picture indeed, leaving one with the feeling that while there may not be a smoking gun there is a whole fusillade of impossibilities regarding the flight of bullets, the nature of the wounds, the ignored testimony of eye witnesses, the sudden and mysterious deaths of witnesses, the disappearance and deliberate destruction of evidence, and the repeated acts of official coverup that continue to this day regarding the release of documents.

Let us focus on just a small part of the immense brief that has been assembled by investigators. Consider the background of Lee Harvey Oswald. During the week of the thirtieth anniversary of the JFK assassination, one repeatedly heard on television that Oswald was an incompetent "loner" and not very bright. Gerald Posner, transforming himself into an instant psychiatric expert, announced that Oswald "had a very disturbed childhood, and he was a passive-aggressive." A passive-aggressive assassin? He was also repeatedly labeled a "loner" and a "leftist." The truth is something else.

Lee Harvey Oswald spent most of his adult life not as a lone drifter but directly linked to the U.S. intelligence community. All of his IQ tests show that he was above average in intelligence and a quick learner. At the age of eighteen in the U.S. Marines he had secret security clearance and was working at Marine Air Control in Atsugi Air Force Base in Japan, a top secret location from which the CIA launched U2 flights and performed other kinds of covert operations in China. The next year he was assigned to El Toro Air Station in California with security clearance to work radar.

Strange things began to happen. While at El Toro, Oswald emerged as a babbling Russophile and a "communist." He started playing Russian language records at blast level in his barracks and addressing his fellow Marines in Russian, calling them "comrade." He read Russian books and hailed Soviet Communism as "the best system in the world." If Oswald was a Soviet or a Cuban spy, as some people now claim, he certainly had a novel way of building a cover. Philip Melanson, author of *Spy Saga*, a book about Oswald's links to intelligence, reminds us that the U.S. Marine Corps in 1958 was not exactly a bastion of liberal tolerance and freethinking. But in this instance, for some strange reason, Oswald's Marine commanders did not seem to mind having a ranting commie sympathizer in their midst. He kept his security clearance and retained access to a wealth of sensitive radar information and classified data from secret facilities.

Other odd things happened. In February 1959, he failed the Marine Corps proficiency test in Russian. Six months later he had developed some fluency in that language. In 1974, a document classified by the Warren Commission--and dislodged mostly by Harold Weisberg's legal efforts--revealed that Oswald had attended the U.S. Army's School of Languages at Monterey. Monterey is not open to anyone who just happens to have a language hobby. One is sent by the government, for training in a specific language pertaining to a specific assignment. Oswald learned Russian at Monterey.

Another curious thing: Oswald applied for an early dependency discharge from the Marines because his mother had injured her foot--the accident had occurred a year earlier. He was released one week after putting in his request, a decision so swift as to astonish his fellow Marines.

Oswald then "defected" to the USSR, but how? Melanson notes that such a trip would have cost at least \$1,500 in those days, but Oswald's bank account showed a balance of \$203. And how did he get from London to Helsinki on October 11, 1959, when no available commercial flight could have made it in one day? He must have had some kind of private transportation to Helsinki.

Once in Russia, he went to the U.S. embassy and openly renounced his U.S. citizenship, declaring that he was going to give military secrets to the Soviets. Embassy officials made no effort to detain him. As the KGB files opened in 1991 show, the Soviets kept him under constant surveillance. KGB defector Yuri Nosenko, who had been responsible for investigating every contact Oswald made in the USSR, reported that the young American had never been associated with Soviet intelligence and that the KGB suspected he was connected with U.S. intelligence.

While in Russia Oswald belonged to a gun club at the factory in which he worked, though he showed no interest in guns. He reportedly used to join in rabbit shoots but could never score a hit. Someone would have to stand behind him and shoot the rabbit while he was firing. His performance became something of a joke among his co-workers. His marksmanship in the U.S. Marines had been no better.

U.S. intelligence mysteriously departed from normal procedure and made no damage assessment of Oswald's "defection," or so they claimed. Another odd thing: after two-and-a-half years, Oswald's sudden request to return to the United States was immediately granted by U.S. officials--all this after he had threatened to give away state secrets to the Soviets. Instead of being arrested for treason, Oswald was accepted with open arms by U.S. authorities.

The CIA claimed it had no record of debriefing him and was never near him. Their explanation before the Warren Commission was that there were so many tourists coming in and out and there was nothing particularly unusual about Oswald that would have caught their attention. One might wonder what was needed to catch the CIA's attention.

Yet, CIA officials claimed they had suspected all along that he was a Soviet spy--which makes it even more curious that they did not debrief him. In fact, they did debrief him in Holland. But being so eager to cover up any association with Oswald, they could not recognize how in this instance the truth would have been a less suspicious cover than the improbable lie they told about never noticing his return.

State Department officials also behaved strangely. They paid all travel and moving expenses back to the United States for Oswald and his wife. Without a moment's delay they gave him back his passport with full rights to travel anywhere in the world. Another curious thing: his wife was exempted from the usual immigration quotas and granted immediate entry. Years before she had belonged to the Soviet Komsomol, the Communist youth organization, which automatically would have barred her from the United States. Yet in violation of U.S. immigration laws, she was allowed into the country.

In Dallas, Lee Harvey Oswald settled under the wing of White Russian emigré and former cavalry officer George de Mohrenschildt, an associate of oil millionaires H. L. Hunt and Clint Murchinson and other Dallas economic elites. In de Mohrenschildt's telephone book was found the name of George "Pappy" Bush. A correspondence existed between Bush and de Mohrenschildt indicating that they were personal acquaintances.

De Mohrenschildt and his wife Jeanne were identified by the Warren Commission as the people closest to Oswald just before the assassination. An investigator for the House Select Committee, Gaeton Fonzi, noted, "Given his background, it seemed strange that de

Mohrenschildt would have spontaneously befriended someone with the look of a working-class drifter like Lee Harvey Oswald." That was not the only strange thing about de Mohrenschildt. He also was part of a network of ex-Nazis contracted by the CIA.

A CIA memorandum written not long after Oswald returned from Russia advised de Mohrenschildt on how to handle the young "defector." De Mohrenschildt also had a close friendship with J. Walter Moore, who was an agent of the CIA's Domestic Contacts Division. As de Mohrenschildt told one investigator just before his sudden death, it was Moore who encouraged him to see Oswald. Investigator Jim Marrs observes in his book *Crossfire*: "The CIA memos, Moore's closeness, and de Mohrenschildt's own testimony all confirm that a certain relationship existed between the CIA and the man closest to Oswald in early 1963. While this does not necessarily involve the Agency in a plot to kill Kennedy, it raises questions about what Agency officials might have known regarding such a plot."

Oswald embarked on a series of short-lived public forays as a "leftist." He started a one-person Fair Play for Cuba chapter in New Orleans, without ever bothering to recruit another member. He never met with a single member of the Communist Party or any other left organization, although he wrote friendly letters to the Communist Party and to the Socialist Workers Party--two groups that were not even talking to each other--supposedly asking for instructions. Again, all this was a novel way for a Soviet agent and would-be assassin to act.

He blazed a highly visible trail as a "leftist" agitator: managing to get exposure on local T.V. in New Orleans after getting involved in some fistfights while leafleting. One of the leaflets he distributed showed that his organization was on Camp Street in the very same building that a former FBI bureau chief, Guy Banister, had his office. Banister retained close working relations with emigré Cuban right-wing groups and with Lee Harvey Oswald.

When he wasn't playing the communist agitator, Oswald spent most of his time with rabid anti-communists, including emigré Cubans and CIA operatives. Besides Banister and de Mohrenschildt, there was David Ferrie. (In his book *First Hand Knowledge*, Robert Morrow, a conservative businessman and CIA operative, tells how he served as a pilot on CIA missions with Ferrie.) Oswald also knew businessman Clay Shaw who was CIA, as later confirmed by the agency's director Richard Helms. These were hardly the sort of friends we would expect for a loudmouthed "Marxist revolutionary" just returned from giving away classified secrets in the USSR.

The attorney general of Texas, Waggoner Carr, told the Warren Commission that Oswald was an FBI informant or contract agent, with assigned number S-172 or S-179. For his services, Oswald was paid two hundred dollars a month by the FBI. Orest Pena, a Cuban emigré and FBI informant, told Mark Lane that Oswald worked for the FBI and met with FBI personnel from time to time.

If not paid by security agencies, how did Oswald support himself during his forays into New Orleans and Dallas? He was employed for a brief time in 1962 by a printing company in Dallas that specialized in highly classified government work, including the making of secret maps of the Soviet Union for U.S. Army Intelligence--again hardly the sort of job to assign an openly Russophilic communist agitator. Oswald's overall employment record and income sources

remain something of a mystery. To this day, the government refuses to release his tax returns, with no explanation as to what issue of national security is at stake.

We are asked to believe that Oswald just happened to get a job at the Texas School Book Depository five weeks before the assassination, when it had not yet been publicized that Kennedy's limousine was going to pass in front of that building. In fact, George de Moerschildt got him the job.

We are asked to believe that Oswald, who could not hit the side of a barn, chose a Mannlicher-Carcano to kill the president, a cheap, poor performance Italian rifle that the Italians said never killed anyone on purpose and caused them to lose World War II. Dallas District Attorney Henry Wade initially announced that the murder weapon was a German Mauser. Later informed that Oswald owned a Manlincher-Carcano, Wade declared that the murder weapon was an "Italian carbine."

We are asked to believe that Oswald would forgo shooting President Kennedy when he had a perfect target of him as he rode right down Houston Street directly toward the Texas School Book Depository. Instead he supposedly waited until the car had turned down Elm Street and was a half-block away. With the President's head and shoulders barely visible through a tree, Oswald supposedly fired rapidly, getting off three shots in record time, one missing the limousine by twenty-five feet and the other two hitting their target with devastating accuracy and record rapid succession, a feat the best marksmen in the country found impossible to emulate even after much practice and after the sights on the Mannlicher-Carcano were properly reset in a laboratory.

We are asked to believe that Oswald then left his rifle at the window, complete with a perfect palm print and, they now say, his fingerprints (but no fingerprints on the clip or handloaded cartridges), along with three spent shells placed on the floor neatly in a row, in a manner no spent shells would fall.

We are asked to believe that a bullet would go through John Kennedy, pause in mid-air, change direction, and wound Governor Connally in several places--something Connally never believed--and reappear perfectly intact wedged into the flap of a stretcher in Parkland Hospital, supposedly having fallen out of Connally's body but obviously pushed into the flap by hand.

We are asked to believe that only three shots were fired when in fact six bullets were noted: one that entered the president's throat and remained in his body; the second extracted from Governor Connally's thigh; a third discovered on the stretcher; a fourth found in fragments in the limousine; a fifth that missed the president's car by a wide margin, hitting the curb according to several witnesses, and wounding onlooker James Thomas Tague on his face; a sixth found in the grass by Dallas police directly across from where the president's vehicle had passed.

The Secret Service took possession of the presidential limousine, ignored reports in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (12/1/63) that there was a bullet hole in the windshield, and rejected all requests to inspect the vehicle. We are asked to believe that the inside of limousine, a trove of



physical evidence, was then quickly torn out and rebuilt, with no thought of covering up anything.

We are asked to believe that Kennedy's autopsy was innocently botched and his brain just accidentally disappeared. The X-ray purporting to be Kennedy's head now shows a rear entry wound, different from the rear exit wound all the pathologists saw. Someone cropped the jaw out of the picture, so there is no opportunity to determine by dental identification if the X-ray really is the president's.

We are asked by people like Max Holland, writing in the *Nation*, to believe that the "infamous picture of Oswald posing with rifle in hand" is not a forgery. Actually there are two pictures, both proven composites, with bodies of different sizes but with the identical head that matches neither body, and with shadows going in incongruous directions. Who fabricated these photos?

"The lone leftist assassin" Oswald was a friend of Jack Ruby, a gangster with links to Cuban exiles and the FBI. Ruby once worked for Congressman Richard Nixon and the House Un-American Activities Committee in Chicago when his name was still Jack Rubenstein. He also worked for the FBI in Dallas during the years before the JFK assassination. Ruby claimed he was just an ordinary private citizen, moved to kill Oswald in order to avenge the suffering Oswald had inflicted upon the Kennedy family.

While in prison Ruby pleaded with the Warren Commission to be taken to Washington where he could tell the whole story. He feared for his life and claimed "they are killing me here." Indeed, he died in jail, supposedly of natural causes.

We are asked to believe that when twenty-four persons who had information related to the case met violent deaths, this was a colossal coincidence. In 1978, after the House Select Committee investigation got underway, Anthony Summers records that another sixteen connected to the case died violently. This too supposedly was just a coincidence. This latter group included George de Mohrenschildt, killed by a gun blast to the head three hours after a House Assassinations Committee Investigator had tried to contact him. De Mohrenschildt had been worried that he would be murdered. His daughter Kressy Keardon believes it "impossible" that he shot himself. The sheriff's office in Palm County, Florida, found the shooting "very strange." But it was ruled a suicide. Generally, people who voice fears that they might be killed do not then kill themselves.

William Sullivan, number three man in the FBI, was secretly on the CIA payroll, according to CIA operative Robert Morrow. He was scheduled to appear before the House Select Committee but before he could do so, he was shot outside his home by a man who claimed to have mistaken him for a deer. The killer was charged with a misdemeanor and released in custody of his father, a state policeman.

While under government protection, mobster Sam Giancana was shot dead one day before he was to testify before the House Select Committee about mob and CIA connections. One of the things that emerges from this whole story is the widespread linkages between the CIA and organized crime, between the gangster state and the gangsters.

When the House committee was putting its staff together, it was heavily pressured to employ only persons acceptable to the CIA, the very agency it was supposed to investigate. In his book

*Plausible Denial*, Mark Lane reports that when Bernard Fensterwald, an independent minded Washington lawyer, was offered the job of general counsel, a CIA representative called on him and said that the Agency would hand him "his head on a platter" if he took the assignment. Fensterwald turned it down.

Is the Kennedy assassination conspiracy just a lot of hoopla kicked up by "conspiracy buffs"? Most of the independent investigators I have met seem to be serious politically literate people. Their struggle to arrive at the truth is not impelled by a love of conspiracies but by a concern for the political and historic importance of the case. They seek the truth no matter how dirty it might be. That process of confronting the machinations of the national security state is not a conspiracy hobby. It is an essential part of the struggle for democracy.

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